



Employees with Mental Illness

Melanie Whetzel, M.A., CBIS
Job Accommodation Network

Mental Health Accommodations



- Established in 1983 as a national, free service.
- Specialize in job accommodations and the employment provisions of the ADA.
- Assist with the interactive process.
- Give targeted technical assistance.
- Provide comprehensive resources.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Communicate via telephone, chat, text, TTY, relay, email, Skype, and social networks.
- Offer live and archived training.
- Work as a partner in making model employers.

Agenda

- Common Mental Health Impairments
- Limitations
- Accommodations
- Situations and Solutions
- ADA Issues
- Questions and Answers



Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (n.d.a) defines a mental health impairment as:

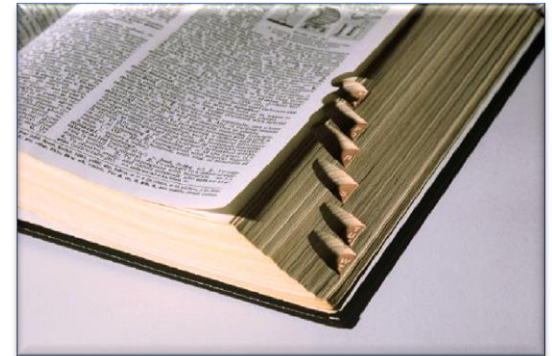
- a medical condition that disrupts a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental health impairments are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life.

** used as source for definitions and statistics in this presentation*

www.nami.org

Common Mental Health Impairments

- Anxiety
- Bipolar Disorder
- Major Depression
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Panic Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



Mental Health Accommodations

Limitations

- Concentration
- Memory
- Organization
- Time Management
- Stress / Emotions
- Panic
- Sleep Disturbances
- Attendance
- Coworker Interaction
- Working Effectively



Daily Accommodation Servings

- Mental health impairments can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income.
- For many people with mental health impairments, the stigma can be worse than the condition.
- Mental health impairments are often revealed in the workplace only when a crisis occurs.
- Statistics
 - 57.7 million Americans diagnosed
 - This is:
 - 26.2% of the population, or
 - **1 in 4 individuals**



ADAAA and Mental Health Impairments

- Major Depressive Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Schizophrenia

= Substantially Limit Brain Function



Job Accommodations



Mental Health Accommodations

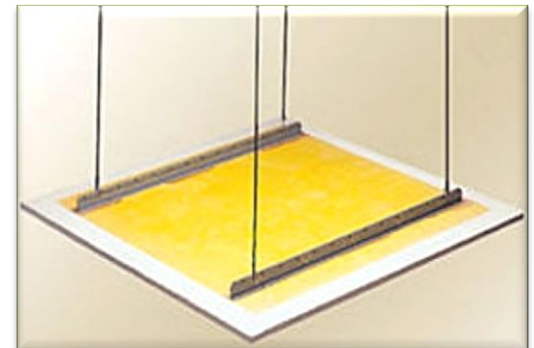
Example

A production manager for a large manufacturer had bipolar disorder. His duties included working 40 hours per week with additional over time to complete and oversee paperwork and shipping orders. He was not meeting his production standards.



Accommodation Issues: **Concentration**

- **Reduce distractions in the work area:**
 - Space enclosures, sound absorption panels, or a private office
 - White noise, music player, or environmental sound machines
 - Uninterrupted “off” work time
 - Desk organizers



Accommodation Issues: **Concentration**

- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Restructure job to include only essential functions



Accommodation

Initially the employee was allowed to work 30 hours per week for one month, increasing to 40 hours per week for the next month. Then, the manager returned back to his regular schedule. He was also provided a work area that was away from noise and given earbuds to listen to music. He also met briefly with his supervisor once a week to discuss workload issues.



Example

A housekeeper with OCD repeatedly checked and re-checked rooms for supplies. She was not completing the number of rooms required during a shift.



Accommodation Issues: **Organization**

- Use daily, weekly, and monthly task lists
- Use calendar with automated reminders to highlight meetings and deadlines
- Use a color coding scheme to prioritize tasks
- Use electronic organizers or mobile devices / apps



Accommodation

The individual was accommodated with a computerized checklist for each supply listed for each type of room.



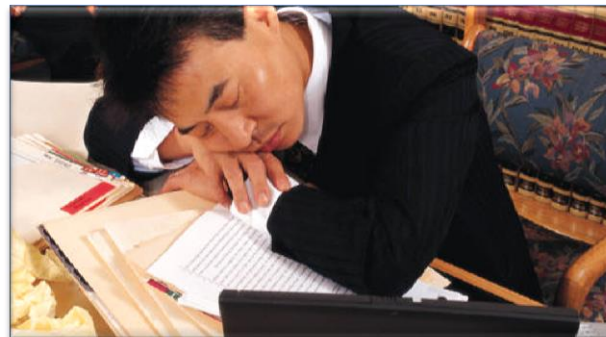
Example

A grocery store bagger with SAD had difficulty working an early schedule due to oversleeping. She also experienced fatigue and depression during late fall and winter months. As a result her attendance was erratic.



Accommodation Issues: **Sleep Disturbances**

- Allow for a flexible start time
- Combine short breaks into one longer break
- Provide a place for the employee to rest
- Allow one consistent schedule
- Provide work areas with natural lighting



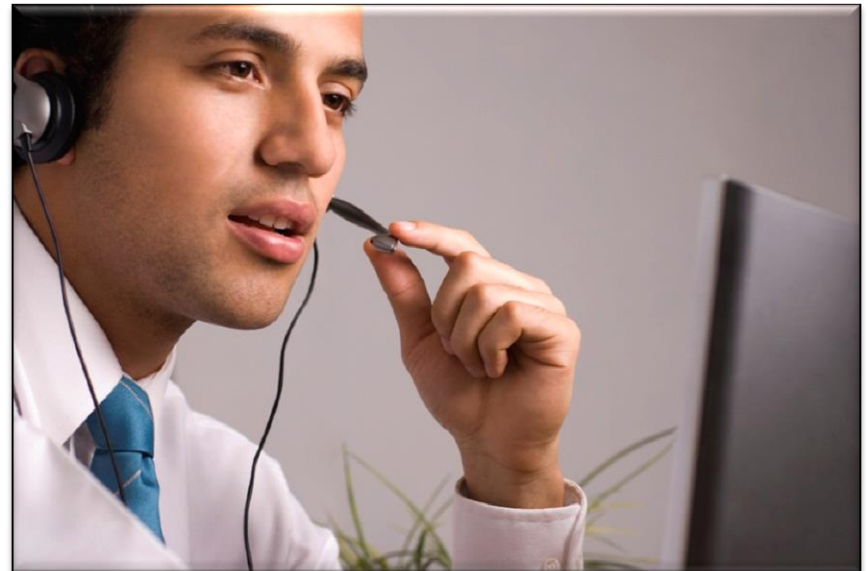
Accommodation

She was accommodated with an afternoon schedule and was moved to the front of the store, which had windows that let sunlight enter her workspace.



Example

A paralegal, who had been carjacked several years earlier, experienced significant anxiety concerning commutes after dark. This caused difficulty concentrating, irritability, and inappropriate interactions with coworkers.



Accommodation Issues: **Working Effectively**

- Develop clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting performance standards
- Schedule consistent meetings with employee to set goals and review progress
- Allow for open communication
- Establish written long-term and short-term goals



Accommodation

He was accommodated with the ability to have a support animal at work and a flexible schedule with work from home during periods of minimal sunlight.



Example

A real estate appraiser with migraine headaches and post-traumatic stress disorder became very stressed when her work environment was noisy. She became angry and was insubordinate to her supervisor.



Accommodation Issues: Stress / Emotions

- Refer to counseling and EAP
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow flexible work environment:
 - Flexible scheduling
 - Modified break schedule
 - Leave for counseling
 - Work from home/Flexi-place
- Modify environmental triggers



Accommodation

The employee was given a headset to help reduce noise in her environment. She was also given a light dimmer to control her workstation lighting and help her with light sensitivity. She was also given time off when she gets migraines.



Example

An electrician with severe depression needed to attend periodic licensure trainings. The person had difficulty taking effective notes and remembering information in the meetings.



Accommodation Issues: **Memory**

- Allow use of job coach /
Provide mentor
- Use auditory or written cues
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists
- Use a **color** coding scheme to prioritize tasks
- Use notebooks, planners, sticky notes, apps to record information
- Provide labels/bulletin board to help locate items
- Provide minutes of meetings and trainings



Accommodation

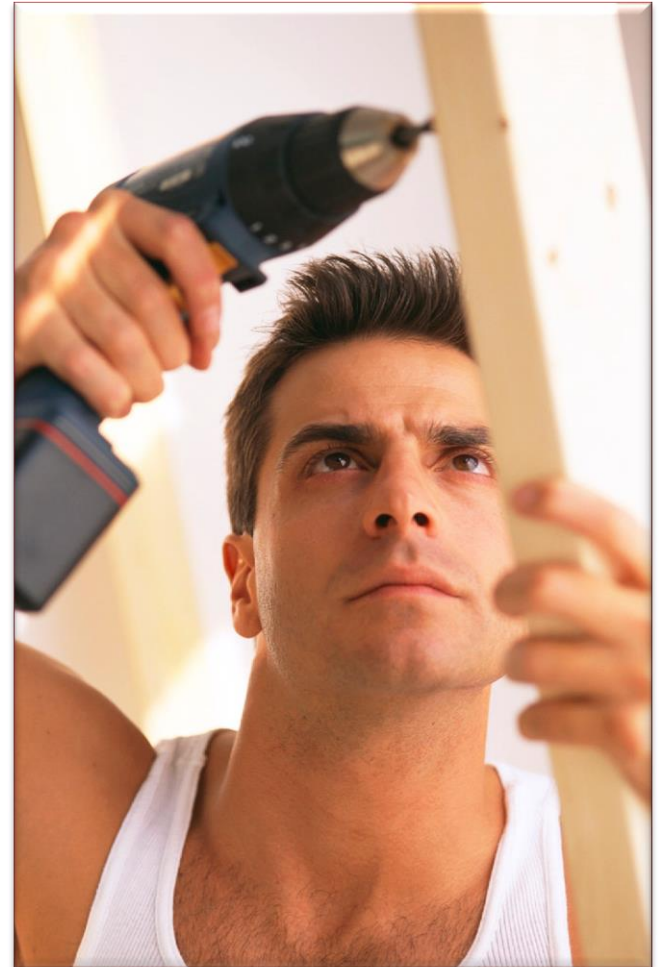
The individual was provided an iPad with apps that would record the trainings. This enabled him to listen to the trainings as many times as he needed. He was also provided training on how to use the device and the apps.



Mental Health Accommodations

Example

A woodworker/carpenter with a panic disorder experienced recurrent panic attacks when traveling during peak traffic times. He was required to pick up and order supplies when necessary.



Accommodation Issues: **Panic Attacks**

- Allow the employee to take a break and go to a place where s/he feels comfortable to use relaxation techniques or contact a support person
- Identify and remove environmental triggers such as particular smells or noises
- Allow the presence of a support animal



Accommodation

He was accommodated with a schedule that gave him the opportunity to drop off and pick up materials when coming to work in the morning.



Example

An attorney with depression experienced memory deficits due to medication, affecting his ability to recall actions and activities during depositions. The attorney became frustrated and continued to miss and reschedule meetings.



Accommodation Issues: Attendance

- Allow flexible work environment:
 - Flexible scheduling
 - Modified break schedule
 - Leave for counseling
 - Work from home/Flexi-place
- Modify environmental triggers



Accommodation

The attorney was given an alternate site to take depositions. He was moved to a smaller conference room with natural lighting away from office noise.



Performance and Conduct Standards

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Example 1: An employer requests a meeting with an employee to talk about some recent difficulties with performance. The employee is surprised. She didn't realize her performance was as low as the employer is stating.



Mental Health Accommodations

Solution: The employee discloses recurrent depression. She states she is finding it difficult to concentrate and remember tasks. The employer asks her what accommodations can help them work together to assist her in reaching her performance goals.



Example 2: A hotel employer conducts a meeting with a housekeeper to talk about her recent performance difficulties. The employer knows that this employee has a diagnosis of OCD, but doesn't mention the disability. The employer is prepared to handle the situation as a performance issue and give a verbal warning. The employee relates her low performance to her OCD and asks for help in meeting performance standards.

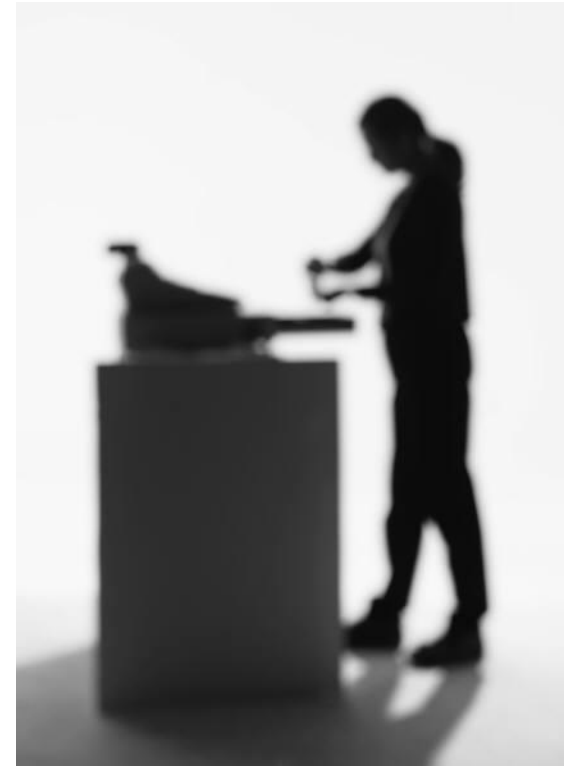
Mental Health Accommodations

Solution: The employer documents that this is a first verbal warning, but doesn't rescind the discipline. He does start the interactive process at this time and asks the employee what she feels would help her meet the timelines of her tasks.



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Example 3: A sales associate in a retail location strikes another employee while on a break. When the store manager intervenes, the employee discloses that she has bipolar disorder and is under a lot of stress and anxiety right now due to a spouse's job loss.



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Solution: The employer doesn't ask anything about the disability, nor does he rescind the termination. The company policy states a zero tolerance for fighting.



Example 4: A nurse with severe depression is written up after several verbal warnings for inappropriate conduct. She is placed on a thirty day plan of improvement and warned that if the behavior doesn't stop within the stated time period, she will be let go. The employee decides to disclose her disability and ask for accommodations to assist her in responding more appropriately to co-workers.

Mental Health Accommodations

Solution: Since the employee discloses and requests accommodations, the employer puts the PIP on hold until they receive medical documentation and put accommodations into place, but does not rescind the discipline that occurred before the disability was known. Once accommodations are put into place, the employer starts the PIP.



Disclosure

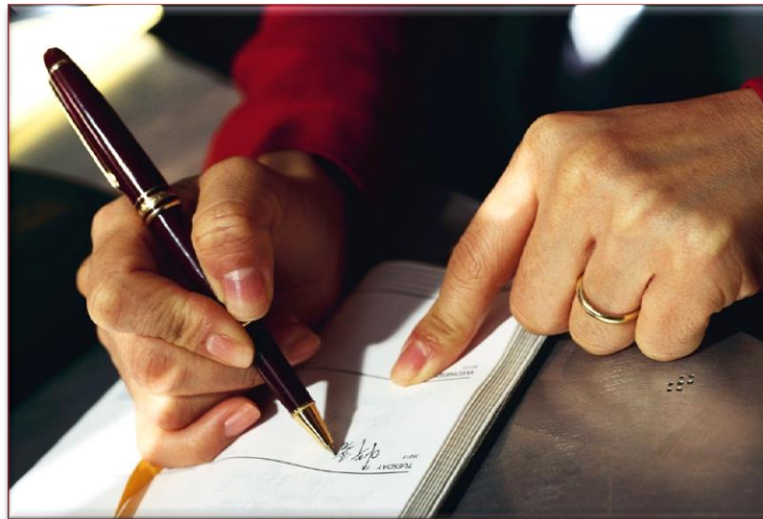
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Example 1: An employee with a bipolar disorder needs to disclose her disability and ask for an accommodation of a flexible schedule while she adjusts to new medication. She is having difficulty sleeping and waking up and has been late three days in a row. She is wary of disclosing her medical condition, but doesn't want to get into disciplinary action.



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Solution: The employee discloses and provides medical documentation. Since her work doesn't depend on or affect others, the employer found no hardship to flex her daily schedule as long as she gets her time in between the core business hours of 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.



Mental Health Accommodations

Example 2: A hospital HR director addresses an employee's continued tardiness by terminating her. The employee is a registered nurse in the ICU and has accumulated numerous incidents after a final warning a week ago.



Mental Health Accommodations

Solution: The nurse discloses that she has OCD and has difficulty getting out of her house in time to get to work by 7:00 am. Because the final warning was given the previous week and the employer saw no improvements, nor did the nurse disclose a disability, the hospital chose to continue with the termination.



Seeking Medical Information

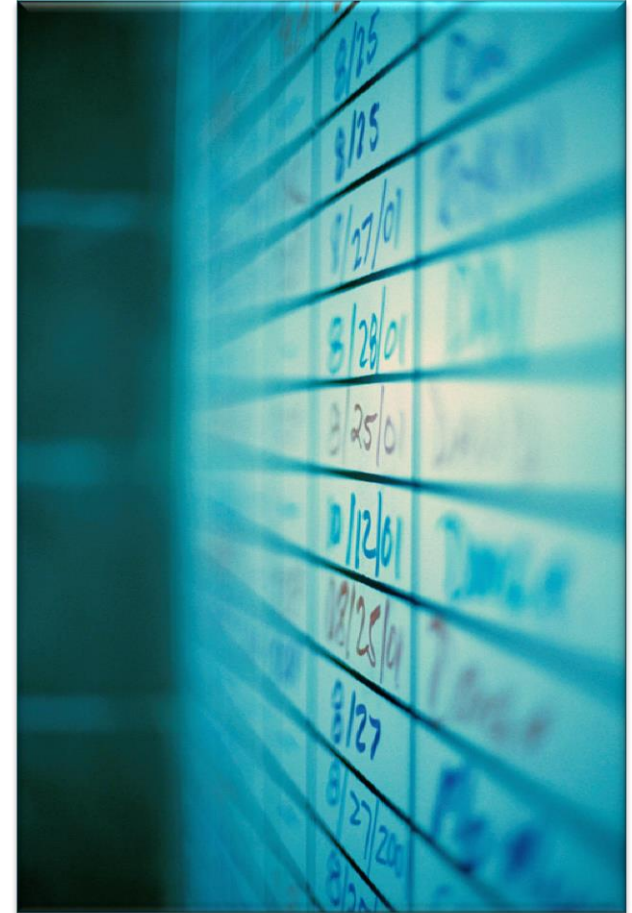
Mental Health Accommodations

Example 1: A longtime IT employee of a university discloses that he has been having severe bouts of depression that have affected his ability to work the night shift. The employee requests that his shift be changed to a day or evening to help him regulate his sleep. The manager is totally surprised because there have been no performance problems.



Mental Health Accommodations

Solution: The manager asks for medical documentation that will provide information as to why the accommodation is needed. The manager then takes a look at the IT schedules to see what can be done to assist this employee.



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Example 2: A 911 dispatcher begins to have panic attacks on the job that cause him to leave his workstation and the phone lines to take a walk outside. The episodes can last anywhere from 20-45 minutes and are increasing in frequency. What started out as a couple of episodes a month have progressed to several daily episodes.



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Solution: The supervisor views this situation as a direct threat, and requests medical information from the employee that includes a job description review form and strategies to keep the panic at bay.



Attendance

Mental Health Accommodations

Example 1: An employee who works in a corrections facility was having difficulty waking up due to new medications she has been prescribed. She has had increasing symptoms of PTSD with the approaching ten year anniversary of the traumatic event.



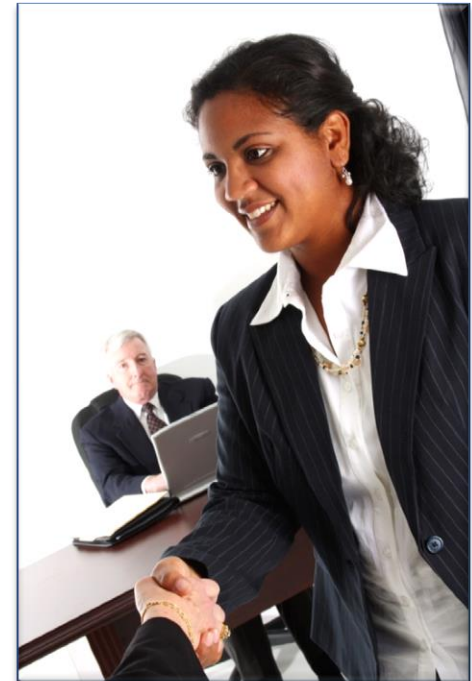
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Solution: Because of her inability to get to work on time and attend work at all on some days, her employer provided her with an accommodation of leave to help her manage the temporary side-effects of the medications.



Mental Health Accommodations

Example 2: A middle school teacher with chronic depression asks for the accommodation of leave one afternoon a week for a sixteen week period so she can attend an intensive out-patient therapy program recommended by her mental health practitioner. The physician feels this treatment is necessary to prevent a depressive episode requiring further leave.



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Solution: Her employer finds no hardship in providing her with a substitute for those sixteen afternoons and provides the requested accommodation.



Questions



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Contact

- (800)526-7234 (V) & (877)781-9403 (TTY)
- AskJAN.org & jan@askjan.org
- (304)216-8189 via Text
- janconsultants via Skype

